

April 13, 2009

MEDIA, PA—On April 13, 2009, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) met with Melinda Cotler, founded and executive director, and Louise Saruk, co-founding parent, of the TALK Institute and School in Newtown Square, Pa., a center for the education of children with autism and language disorders. April is Autism Awareness Month, and the Congressman discussed his support for Autism treatment and education and special education provisions in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Congressman Sestak has introduced legislation to improve the level of care provided to military children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). In the last session of Congress, Congressman Sestak successfully placed an amendment into the National Defense Authorization Act that enhanced the funding and research for autism for military families, increasing it by 100 percent. This new legislation would ensure treatment which is considered medically necessary for a child with ASD will be covered by TRICARE for military families.

“Providing improved coverage for autism therapies for military families will have far reaching effects for non-military families who are currently fighting for autism insurance reform in many states across the country,” said Congressman Sestak. “We cannot allow our children with autism to be shortchanged. With access to the right, medically-necessary, evidence-based therapies like Applied Behavioral Analysis, these children can make incredible gains and reach their full potential.”

“I believe that we have an obligation to provide the same affordable, quality and accessible care that I received in the Navy to the many military and civilian children who suffer from autism every day. I hope we will set an example for state legislatures, so that autistic children benefit from the best possible care and have the ability to provide for themselves as adults.”

Congressman Sestak was also a strong advocate for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (“stimulus bill”) which provides \$12.2 billion for grants for IDEA funding for special education.

The TALK Institute and School, formerly the Magnolia School, is the nation's most progressive center for the education of children with autism and language disorders. "As teachers, therapists and researchers we are at the forefront of a new, more accurate and person-centered understanding of autism—one that presents autism as a sensory-based movement disorder profoundly affecting language, social interaction and praxis," according to the institute. "While the scientific literature is just beginning to reflect this view, TALK has always recognized that sensory and movement difficulties are at the foundation of autism and other language disorders. As a consequence, TALK provides intensive occupational and speech therapy to support a full-day systematic, multisensory, language-based curriculum."

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

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